United Nations S/2017/881

Security Council

Distr.: General
19 October 2017

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments related to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my last report, which was issued on 11 July 2017 (S/2017/592), and the briefing of my Special Representative for Iraq to the Council on 17 July.

II. Summary of key political developments pertaining to Iraq

A. Political situation

2. On 25 September 2017, a unilaterally declared referendum on independence was held in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and in some areas outside the region that are disputed with the federal Government of Iraq, including Kirkuk Governorate. The following question was posed in the referendum: "Do you agree to the independence of the Kurdistan region and the Kurdistani areas (disputed areas) outside the administration of the region, and the establishment of an independent State?" On the eve of the referendum, all the main political parties in the Kurdistan region endorsed a "yes" vote, with the exception of the Movement for Change (Gorran), which advised its supporters to make their own decision.

3. On 26 September, the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Masoud Barzani, released a statement asserting that the vote had not been meant to impose a fait accompli or to draw borders but to provide a mandate for negotiations with Baghdad and to allow the people of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to express their stance on the issue of independence. He stressed that his Government was ready to immediately engage in negotiations on independence with Baghdad and called upon the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, to keep the door to dialogue open.

4. According to a statement by the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral and Referendum Commission on 27 September, 92.73 per cent of the 3,085,935 voters backed independence.

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5. Reactions to the referendum at the federal level were immediate. On 26 September, the Council of Ministers ordered the suspension of all non-humanitarian, non-emergency international flights from the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports, effective 29 September, until the Federal Border Port Authority and the Federal Civil Aviation Authority could establish control over the airports. The Council of Ministers also instructed the Port Authority to establish control over border crossings in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

6. Also on 26 September, Mr. Al-Abadi repeated that the referendum had been illegal and unconstitutional, and had been held without international recognition. He pledged that the federal Government would uphold its authority in accordance with the Constitution. He also stressed that dialogue on the basis of the Constitution — not force — was the only option for resolving the dispute between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and he refused to hold talks on the results of the referendum or on independence.

7. On 27 September, the Council of Representatives declared that the referendum was unconstitutional, null and void, and adopted a resolution endorsing measures against the Kurdistan region of Iraq. In the resolution, the Council of Representatives called upon the Prime Minister, inter alia, to take all constitutional and legal measures to preserve the unity of Iraq; to deploy Iraqi security forces to areas under their control prior to June 2014; to reclaim oil fields in Kirkuk Governorate and disputed territories and return them to the control of the Government of Iraq; and to relocate foreign diplomatic missions in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to other areas of the country. On 28 September, the Kurdistan Regional Government rejected the resolution of the Council of Representatives, described the measures as "collective punishment of the Kurdish nation" and pledged to pursue an appeal. On 30 September, the Prime Minister issued a statement reassuring the people of the Kurdistan region of Iraq that the federal Government would uphold their equal rights and that the measures were not punitive, but were meant to prevent the illicit movement of people and goods.

8. International reaction to the referendum was swift. While expressing disappointment that the referendum had been held and that it lacked legitimacy, the majority of statements noted with concern the ensuing risks of instability in the country and in the region, and expressed support for the constitutionally mandated role of the central Government, and for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. Many of the statements also urged all sides to exercise calm and restraint, refrain from provocative statements and actions, engage constructively in a respectful dialogue and cooperation on all outstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil within the framework of the Constitution and abide by the rulings of the federal Supreme Court.

9. In the lead-up to the referendum, political actors in Baghdad took steps to challenge its legality, including the insistence by the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq that the referendum be held in Kirkuk Governorate and other disputed areas. On 18 July, the Prime Minister informed the Kirkuk Provincial Council that a referendum could not be held in Kirkuk, given that article 140 of the Constitution of Iraq had not yet been implemented. On 17 August, the Baghdad Administrative Court ruled that the decision of 28 March by the Kirkuk Provincial Council to fly the flag of the Kurdistan region of Iraq in front of government buildings in Kirkuk and at official occasions was illegal. On 29 August, the Kirkuk Provincial Council decided that the Governorate would participate in the referendum, in a session boycotted by Council members from Turkmen and Arab political parties. On 14 September, the Council of Representatives voted to dismiss the Governor of Kirkuk, Najmaldin Karim. The decision was rejected by the Governor and members of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

10. On 12 September, the Council of Representatives voted to reject the referendum as unconstitutional and called for all measures necessary to prevent the referendum and preserve the unity of Iraq as well as to promote dialogue and the resolution of all pending issues in accordance with the Constitution. No member of the Kurdistan Alliance took part in the vote.

11. In response to several complaints against the referendum, including a formal request by the Prime Minister, the federal Supreme Court issued an order on 18 September to halt the referendum until it had ruled on its legality, but did not touch on the substantive question of the constitutionality of the referendum. On 29 September, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, through his representative in Karbala', called upon Baghdad and Erbil to uphold the Constitution.

12. Prior to the referendum, Mr. Al-Abadi repeatedly underscored that the decision to conduct the referendum was unconstitutional and illegal and could not be adopted unilaterally by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Instead, he emphasized that dialogue was the only mechanism for resolving all outstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil and ruled out the use of force to stop the referendum. For his part, Mr. Barzani consistently stated that Iraqi Kurds had a legitimate right to self-determination and articulated a vision of an independent Kurdistan. He and other authorities in the Kurdistan Regional Government frequently repeated that the referendum would not result in immediate independence, but would help start negotiations with the federal Government on how to live together as good neighbours.

13. To postpone the referendum, Mr. Barzani demanded international guarantees that eventual independence would be accepted. On 22 September, he said it was too late to postpone the referendum and that further dialogue with Baghdad would resume only after the vote. On the eve of the referendum, Mr. Al-Abadi and Mr. Barzani repeated that the forces under their control — the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga, respectively — would not engage in any offensive actions.

14. A number of regional and international actors, including China, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, voiced their concerns about the referendum or rejected it as such, and confirmed their support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and for dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil on all issues. On 21 September, the Security Council issued a statement to the press in which it expressed concern about the potentially destabilizing impact of the referendum.

15. On 9 September, during a visit to Iraq, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, expressed support for the unity of Iraq, called for dialogue and requested that the referendum be postponed. On 26 August, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Armed Forces of France, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Florence Parly, visited Baghdad and Erbil and underscored the support of France for the unity of Iraq. In telephone conversations with Mr. Al-Abadi and Mr. Barzani, on 4 and 10 August respectively, the United States Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, emphasized the need to focus on defeating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and stabilizing Iraq, and reaffirmed the support of the United States for a unified, federal and democratic Iraq. On 22 September, the National Security Council of Turkey stated that the planned referendum was illegitimate and unacceptable and again warned of grave consequences. It stated that Turkey reserved all its rights emanating from bilateral and international agreements if the referendum were held. Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey coordinated their responses to the referendum, as confirmed by their respective

Ministers for Foreign Affairs at a meeting on the margins of the General Assembly on 20 September, when Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey pledged to support Iraq.

16. A high-level delegation representing the High Council on the Referendum, a body created by the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq in June, visited Baghdad from 14 to 21 August, where it met with members of the federal Government, including the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Salim al-Jubouri, and the Vice-President of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, as well as the ambassadors of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Turkey and the United States, and my Special Representative. While the need for dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil had been emphasized, it nevertheless failed to materialize.

17. On 14 September, my Special Representative, the Special Presidential Envoy of the United States for the International Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk, the Ambassador of the United States to Iraq, Douglas Silliman, and the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Iraq, Frank Baker, proposed to the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq meaningful negotiations on all the issues relating to Baghdad-Erbil relations as an alternative to the referendum. On 17 September, the High Council for the Referendum officially rejected the proposal.

18. On 23 September, Mr. Barzani sent another high-level delegation to Baghdad, with a mandate to restate the position of the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding the referendum and to convey the message that it would be ready to start negotiations, but only after the referendum, in order to start building the foundation for good-neighbourly relations. The delegation met with representatives of the Iraqi National Forces Alliance, who rejected such negotiations after the referendum. Mr. Al-Abadi refused to meet the delegation.

19. Throughout the reporting period, several parties in the Kurdistan region of Iraq continued to insist on the reactivation of the Regional Parliament. On 15 September, the Regional Parliament reconvened for the first time since October 2015, during which it tasked the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral and Referendum Commission with organizing the referendum. The session was boycotted by the Movement for Change (Gorran) and the Kurdistan Islamic Group. In a legislative session on 30 September that was also boycotted by those two groups, the Regional Parliament adopted a resolution calling for the implementation of the referendum outcome and changed the name of the High Council for the Referendum to the Kurdistan Political Leadership-Iraq. On 2 October, the Movement for Change (Gorran) called for the abolishment of Kurdistan Political Leadership-Iraq and urged Baghdad and Erbil to engage in dialogue within the framework of the Constitution.

20. The Council of Representatives made limited progress on key electoral legislation. On 7 August, it voted on amendments to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008, as amended), including the formula used for allocating seats, which is a matter of political and public debate, as smaller parties demand a provision that allows for their representation. Other articles that have been adopted provisionally include those that authorize the holding of elections to the Provincial Councils and the Council of Representatives concurrently; abolish subdistrict council elections; and extend the terms of the current Provincial Councils until the next election.

21. New political parties and alliances were formed during the reporting period. On 15 July, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and members of the Sunni-led Iraqi National Forces Coalition announced the establishment of the Iraqi National Forces Alliance, an umbrella organization of mostly Sunni Arab actors. On

24 July, the Chairman of the Iraqi National Forces Alliance and Chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, Ammar al-Hakim, announced the establishment of a new political party, the National Wisdom Movement, and assumed its chairmanship. On 18 August, the Speaker convened the founding conference of the Civil Society for Reform Party, which proclaimed a cross-sectarian agenda. Although his tenure as Chairman of the Iraqi National Forces Alliance expired on 5 September, Mr. Al-Hakim retained his position pending the appointment of a successor.

22. On 20 July, the Governor of Salah al-Din, Ahmed al-Jubouri, was convicted of misusing authority and federal funds, which resulted in the appointment of an interim Governor. On the same day, the Governor of Anbar, Suhaib al-Rawi, was dismissed by the Provincial Council after being charged with corruption. On 10 August, the Governor of Basrah, Majid al-Nasrawi, resigned after a warrant had been issued for his arrest on corruption charges. On 12 September, the Chairman of the Basrah Provincial Council, Sabah Hassan al-Bazouni, was convicted of bribery, but remains in his post pending sentencing.

B. Security

23. On 20 August, Iraqi security forces launched a military operation in Tall Afar district, Ninawa Governorate. Tall Afar's liberation was declared by Mr. Abadi on 31 August, which also marked the full liberation of Ninawa from ISIL. On 2 September, Mr. Barzani called Mr. Al-Abadi to congratulate him on the liberation of Tall Afar; both leaders agreed on the importance of continuing coordination and cooperation. In western Anbar, Iraqi security forces liberated the towns of Akashat and Ana, on 16 September and 22 September, respectively.

24. On 21 September, Mr. Al-Abadi announced the first phase of an operation to liberate Hawijah district, in which the Iraqi army, federal police and the popular mobilization forces, among others, took part. By 24 September, the operation had liberated the Sharqat district and most areas north of the Al-Zab River, officially concluding the first phase of the military operation on 27 September. On 29 September, Mr. Al-Abadi announced the launch of the second phase of the operation to retake Hawijah. On 10 October, Mr. Al-Abadi announced the full liberation of Hawijah and Daquq districts and the surrounding Makhoul and Hamrin mountain areas, officially concluding military operations that had begun on 21 September, in which the Iraqi army, the federal police and the popular mobilization forces, among others, took part.

25. Baghdad continued to experience frequent asymmetric attacks. Between 12 July and 19 September, improvised explosive device attacks across the city killed 163 civilians and wounded 360. In Babil Governorate, improvised explosive devices and vehicle bomb attacks killed 91. ISIL increased asymmetric attacks in the disputed areas, in particular Daquq district, the city of Tuz Khurmatu and the outskirts of the city of Kirkuk.

26. On 14 September, ISIL claimed a twin attack which involved the detonation of body-borne improvised explosive devices at a restaurant and a security checkpoint in the town of al-Bathah, Dhi Qar Governorate. On the same day, ISIL attacked another restaurant along the Nasiriyah-Basrah highway, in Dhi Qar, reportedly killing over 80 civilians and members of security forces and wounding 93 more people.

27. On 20 September, the Kurdistan Regional Government issued a statement condemning a reported airstrike by the Turkish Armed Forces that day in Shiladiza, Dahuk Governorate, claiming that it had killed nine civilians.

28. On 27 September, ISIL launched three, nearly simultaneous attacks in Ramadi, Anbar Governorate, that targeted Iraqi security forces. ISIL fighters took control of the locations involved for several hours, until they were dislodged by reinforcements from the Iraqi security forces. Later reports indicated that at least 30 members of the Iraqi security forces had been captured by the attackers, and at least 17 more had been killed. Those attacks underlined the fact that ISIL still retains the intent and ability to wreak havoc, especially in locations with light or no substantial protection by the Iraqi security forces.

C. Regional and international developments

29. Regional and international partners welcomed progress in the fight against ISIL, offered continued security cooperation and pledged reconstruction assistance.

30. Members of the Government of Iraq paid visits to neighbouring countries to strengthen bilateral ties. While in Iran (Islamic Republic of) on 5 August, the President of Iraq met with the Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Emad Khamees. The two leaders agreed on joint coordination to defeat ISIL. On 23 July, the Vice-President of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, travelled to Moscow, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, who stressed the importance of cooperation against terrorism and renewed the support of the Russian Federation to the quadripartite information centre in Baghdad, which had been opened by Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic. Iraqi cleric and leader of the Sadrist Movement, Muqtada al-Sadr, visited Saudi Arabia from 30 July to 1 August, where he met with the Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Adel al-Jubeir. On 9 August, the Iraqi Minister of Oil, Jabbar al-Luiebi, travelled to Saudi Arabia where he met with the Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources, Khalid al-Falih, and discussed cooperation to stabilize international oil prices.

31. Iraq concluded bilateral and other agreements to boost security cooperation and strengthen economic ties. On 23 July, the Minister of Defence of Iraq, Irfan al-Hayali, and the Minister of Defence of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Hossein Dehqan, signed a memorandum of understanding on increased cooperation in the fight against terrorism. On 21 July, in Baghdad, the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Armed Forces, Major General Othman al-Ghanmi, and his counterpart in the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, General Abdul Rahman al-Banyan, agreed to open the 'Ar'ar and Muthanna — Rafha border crossings. On 14 August, the border crossing was opened for commercial use for the first time in 27 years. On 30 August, Iraq celebrated the opening of the Turaybil border crossing with Jordan. On 30 July, the Minister of Oil of Iraq, Jabbar al-Luiebi, and his Iranian counterpart, Bijan Zangeneh, preliminarily agreed on joint investment to develop the Naft Khanah and Sinbad oilfields, both located on the Iraqi-Iranian border in Diyala and Basrah Governorates. On 18 August, the Kurdistan Regional Government signed a deal with the oil company Rosneft, reportedly to build a new gas pipeline to Turkey.

32. Reconstruction assistance was pledged by government officials from various countries, including Egypt, France, India, Turkey and the United Kingdom. On 20 September, the Prime Minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al Sabah, reiterated his country's intention to host in 2018 an international donor conference on the reconstruction of Iraq.

33. On 12 September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Jafari, attended a meeting of the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States, in Cairo, where he called for closer coordination to combat terrorism and reiterated his Government's call upon Turkey to withdraw its troops from Iraq. On 23 September,

the Foreign Minister led the Iraqi delegation to the General Assembly, during which he rejected the referendum, urged the international community to support the reconstruction of Iraq and the return of internally displaced persons and pledged the commitment of Iraq to ending internal sectarian divisions and promoting regional cooperation.

34. A reported agreement to relocate a number of ISIL fighters and their families from the Lebanese-Syrian border to the town of Albu Kamal, in the Syrian Arab Republic and near the border with Iraq, prompted negative reactions in Iraq, including from the Prime Minister and the President.

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

35. My Special Representative continued his engagement with government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders to foster inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation towards a united, stable and peaceful Iraq. He urged interlocutors to advance political, economic and social reforms. My Special Representative underscored the importance of supporting the safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their homes and assisting the families of martyrs and demobilized fighters.

36. Following the announcement by Mr. Barzani of a referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the disputed territories, my Special Representative engaged extensively with the main stakeholders in Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah. In his consultations with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, he advised the Kurdistan Regional Government against taking any unilateral action concerning the referendum. He reiterated that all outstanding issues, as well as principles and arrangements that determine future relations between Baghdad and Erbil, should be resolved through dialogue and constructive compromise, and offered United Nations assistance, in coordination with the international community. He reaffirmed the United Nations commitment to a united, federal and democratic Iraq.

37. My Special Representative continued his engagement with a broad spectrum of stakeholders within Iraq and in the region in support of the National Settlement Initiative. Based on the vision papers presented to UNAMI by representatives of various components and representatives, the Mission prepared a non-paper and presented it to Iraqi interlocutors for their review and comments.

38. As part of the engagement of UNAMI to foster inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, in particular in the post-ISIL period, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs visited Mosul on 29 August, where he met political dignitaries and congratulated them on the recent military victory in Tall Afar against ISIL and progress in the rehabilitation of eastern Mosul. He encouraged all parties to continue in their efforts to reconcile the various components of Ninawa. He also launched a series of nationwide roundtables on the theme "National settlement: prospects and challenges". The first event, held in Karbala' on 16 September, brought together 49 political, religious, tribal and civil society stakeholders to work towards reconciliation at all political and social levels.

39. In view of the planned provincial council and parliamentary elections in 2018, my Special Representative engaged with political and parliamentary leaders and the federal Independent High Electoral Commission to underscore the importance of

holding elections as scheduled and required by the Constitution. He further stressed the need for the Council of Representatives to expedite and complete the selection of the new Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission to ensure a continuation of the democratic process in Iraq, and encouraged the representation of women and minorities, in line with the domestic and international legal obligations of Iraq. He continued to urge the Government of Iraq to ensure that displaced persons are enfranchised and are enabled to exercise their civil and political responsibilities, and to expedite the registration of political parties to enable their free and effective participation in the electoral process.

40. UNAMI continued to promote women's participation and representation in political processes, including national reconciliation dialogues. On 18 July, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs attended a consultative forum in Baghdad organized by UNAMI and UN-Women and emphasized that women's voices should be central to all peacebuilding activities in Iraq. UNAMI and the non-governmental organization Women Peace Group held a series of consultative meetings with senior political leaders in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Baghdad to strengthen the role of women in political processes.

41. As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the capacity of State institutions of Iraq to address sexual violence in conflict, UNAMI, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and with the support of United Nations agencies, organized training sessions on the issue, including on addressing the stigma faced by survivors and children born of rape, for government officials in Baghdad and Erbil. In August, the United Nations established the first technical working group for Iraq, the Middle East and North Africa under the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1960 (2010).

42. On 27 August, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs presented to the Office of the Prime Minister recommendations stemming from the forums on the theme "Iraq: youth and coexistence". He emphasized the importance of engaging with the youth of Iraq across sectarian, ethnic and other divides as a means of achieving national reconciliation.

B. Electoral assistance

43. On 19 September, the Council of Representatives decided to extend the mandate of the current Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission until 20 October instead of voting in nine new members based on a list submitted by the Parliament Ad Hoc Committee for the Selection of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. UNAMI strongly advocated for women and minority representation and issued two statements, on 9 and 21 August, respectively, urging the Council of Representatives to ensure their adequate representation in the new Board and to expedite the selection process to ensure a seamless transition to the new Board.

44. The decision to postpone the provincial council elections and the adoption by the Council of Representatives of an amendment to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008, as amended) provide additional time for the Independent High Electoral Commission to prepare for the elections. With the support of UNAMI, the Commission began to demonstrate the use of new electronic vote counting equipment to electoral stakeholders at the national and Governorate levels. Ahead of the election, intensive public outreach will be required to ensure that voters and stakeholders are aware of the new technology.

45. On 19 July, Mr. Barzani issued a presidential decree setting the region's presidential and parliamentary elections for 1 November. The Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission commenced technical preparations for the elections, including by conducting a voter registration update from 20 to 26 August. The Commission also contracted with a Canadian company to provide technical and operational support for both the referendum and the regional-level elections, activated a dedicated website for the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora to register to vote in absentia in the referendum, and opened offices in areas outside the Kurdistan region of Iraq, including Khanaqin, Diyala Governorate; Shaykhan, Ninawa Governorate; Tuz Khurmatu, Salah al-Din Governorate; the city of Kirkuk, and Kirkuk Governorate. It has stated its intention to open offices in Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate.

C. Human rights developments and activities

46. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a heavy toll on civilians. From 17 July to 23 September, at least 410 men, women and children were killed and at least 666 wounded, bringing the total number of civilian casualties in Iraq since the beginning of the armed conflict in January 2014 to at least 84,085 (29,635 killed and 54,450 wounded).

47. UNAMI continued to advocate for accountability in the context of human rights violations and abuses committed in the ongoing armed conflict, in particular serious crimes that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide. UNAMI also continued to advocate for legal reforms and worked on expanding the capacities of the judiciary to address international crimes effectively. UNAMI has also been promoting the proper protection of mass graves, with the aim of collecting and preserving evidence.

48. Despite having suffered serious setbacks on the battlefield, the latest of which was the retaking of Tall Afar and the fall of Hawijah, ISIL continued to target civilians and to resort to asymmetrical attacks that caused civilian casualties. ISIL also continued to punish civilians in areas still under its control. According to some sources, there may be as many as 1,563 Yazidi women and girls who remain enslaved by ISIL.

49. Children continue to be killed and maimed during fighting and by improvised explosive devices, mines and unexploded ordnance. During the reporting period, the United Nations verified 30 cases of children having been recruited and used by ISIL. In addition, cases of recruitment and use of children, reportedly by those operating under the popular mobilization forces, have been reported in the south of Kirkuk. Lack of access to conflict-affected areas continues to be a major concern with respect to fully documenting grave violations against children perpetrated by parties to the conflict.

50. On 18 July, ISIL gunmen killed a local village elder and four of his relatives in a village north-west of Kirkuk. On 28 August, a vehicle-borne explosive attack in the Sadr City district of Baghdad killed four civilians and wounded at least eight others, including two policemen.

51. On 3 August, ISIL shot and killed two civilians for providing intelligence to Iraqi security forces in Tall Afar. On 17 August, ISIL reportedly killed three civilians in Al-Qa'im, Anbar Governorate, because they refused to join the group.

52. Explosives reportedly left behind by ISIL and explosive remnants of war in areas once controlled by the armed group continued to cause civilian casualties. On 2 August, the detonation of an improvised explosive device in a house killed two

civilians in western Mosul. On 25 August, the detonation of an improvised explosive device killed three civilians and wounded two others in the Karmah area, Anbar Governorate.

53. Mass graves continued to be discovered in areas retaken from ISIL. On 3 August, a mass grave containing 24 bodies, including those of 8 children and 4 women, was discovered in the al-Sha'arin neighbourhood, in western Mosul. On 25 August, officials discovered two mass graves in the Badush subdistrict, in Ninawa Governorate.

54. A spate of attacks by unknown gunmen targeted civilians in Mosul. On 4 August, a group of gunmen wearing black masks shot and killed two male civilians while they were leaving the mosque after Friday prayers in the Bakr neighbourhood, in eastern Mosul. On 12 September, an armed group shot and killed three civilians who were members of the same family, in the Sukkar neighbourhood of eastern Mosul.

55. Cases of abductions of displaced persons by unknown perpetrators occurred in Salah al-Din Governorate. On 31 July, gunmen abducted a Sunni Turkmen displaced person in Tuz Khurmatu district. On 23 August, in the same district, gunmen abducted a Sunni Arab displaced person.

56. On 18 July, the Office of the Prime Minister acknowledged that violations described as "individual acts" by Iraqi security forces had occurred in the battle to retake Mosul from ISIL and maintained that punishment would be sought for the perpetrators. On 17 August, Iraqi authorities announced the findings of an investigation team previously established by the Ministry of the Interior to investigate allegations of violations reported by international media. The authorities confirmed that the investigation had been completed and acknowledged that some of the violations had been committed by members of the rapid response division of the Iraqi federal police during their operations against ISIL in Mosul district, and that those individuals had been referred to the judiciary. The authorities refuted some of the allegations reported by international media, but did not provide further information.

57. Tribal-based extrajudicial punitive measures continue to be taken, targeting families alleged to have relatives affiliated with or members of ISIL, in order to expel them or prevent them from returning to their areas of origin. On 30 July, a letter of understanding to prevent the families of alleged ISIL members from returning to their areas and homes was reportedly adopted at a meeting of tribes in western Anbar allegedly attended by, among others, the Governor of Anbar. On 19 August, a group of civilians staged a peaceful demonstration calling upon local authorities to expel families with members who had joined or supported ISIL in western Mosul. On 22 August, the Babil Provincial Council adopted a decision to bring legal proceedings against any politician or political party that called for the return of thousands of displaced persons to their homes in Jurf al-Sakhr. On 25 August, UNAMI expressed concern at that decision, asking that it be repealed and that the right to return to one's own home be respected.

58. Iraq continued to sentence people to death and to carry out the death penalty. On 8 August, the Central Criminal Court in Baghdad sentenced 25 people to death for their role in the Camp Speicher mass killing of June 2014 and acquitted 25 others for lack of evidence. The sentences were handed down based on article 4 of Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005. On 6 July, the Ministry of Justice announced online that 14 executions had been carried out in June. No further details were provided. On 23 August, three convicts were reportedly executed in Nasiriyah Central Prison, in Dhi Qar Governorate. However, the Ministry of Justice did not provide any public information on this. On 24 September, 42 prisoners in that prison

were executed in a mass hanging. The United Nations has repeatedly called upon the Government of Iraq to impose a moratorium on all death sentences and executions.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

59. The evacuation of 998,010 civilians from Mosul during military operations by the Iraqi security forces represents one of the largest managed evacuations under battlefield conditions in recent history. The principles guiding the evacuation were outlined in the humanitarian concept of operations of the Iraqi security forces, which put civilian protection at the centre of the Mosul battle plan. During the nine-month campaign, civilians were evacuated daily across front lines to muster points, where they were disarmed, and then transported by the Government of Iraq to the screening and reception centre at Hammam al-Alil. Following screening, families could choose to stay in one of the 19 emergency sites and camps operated by the Government and humanitarian partners or in accommodation sponsored by family and friends.

60. The Mosul humanitarian operation is one of the largest in the region. A total of 125 humanitarian partners are providing life-saving support, reaching nearly 1.9 million people in and near Mosul, including hundreds of thousands of civilians who remain in their homes, protected by the Iraqi security forces, 320,000 people living in emergency camps and sites and 385,000 civilians living in sponsored accommodation.

61. By early September, 97 per cent of families had returned to eastern Mosul, but 700,000 people from western Mosul remained displaced. Depending on the pace of decontamination and security arrangements, returns to western Mosul are likely to accelerate following the conclusion of military operations in Hawijah. The process is expected to be one of the most complex and difficult in the country. Preliminary damage and loss assessments confirm extensive damage in 15 of the 54 residential neighbourhoods and moderate damage in 23 districts. Nearly all buildings in the densely populated old city have been damaged beyond repair, and an estimated 32,000 houses have been destroyed across Mosul.

62. Military operations continue to cause new displacements. In the week prior to the start of fighting in Tall Afar, more than 20,000 people, half of them children, fled, doubling the number of people displaced from the district since April. In the months ahead, humanitarian partners estimate that as many as 100,000 civilians may be forced to flee from areas where fighting is likely, including western Anbar.

63. Protection concerns remain paramount. Civilians in ISIL-controlled areas continue to face extreme risks, including possible extrajudicial killing, torture, enslavement, violence, restriction of movement and property alienation. Families fleeing their homes are in danger from explosive hazards, snipers, crossfire, bombardment and sexual and gender-based violence. On 29 August, a suicide attack at a checkpoint in Bshar resulted in the death of three civilians fleeing Tall Afar. During displacement, family members have sometimes become separated; 1,296 children were reunited with their families with support from humanitarian agencies during the reporting period. Efforts are under way to reunite 436 children, who are still in interim care arrangements until their families can be traced. Forms of collective punishment have been reported in certain return areas, including in Salah al-Din. Despite commitments to ensure a safe, voluntary and dignified return process, families continue to be evicted from areas of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninawa and other areas, sometimes by local councils.

64. The humanitarian operation in Iraq continues to be one of the largest in the world. It is estimated that, in 2017, 11 million Iraqis will require some form of

humanitarian assistance. The Government of Iraq and national organizations are providing nearly 80 per cent of humanitarian assistance. The Kurdistan Regional Government hosts, protects and assists nearly 1 million displaced Iraqis. In support of the national effort, humanitarian partners aim to reach 6.2 million highly vulnerable people and contribute to the provision of care, assistance and protection in line with international standards. In 2017, humanitarian organizations have reached 6 million highly vulnerable Iraqis, including 2.1 million people who have been affected by the crisis in Mosul. On average, humanitarian partners have been reaching nearly 1 million people with some form of humanitarian assistance each month.

65. By the end of military operations, 3.5 million Iraqis are likely to be displaced. Of the 5.4 million Iraqi civilians displaced since the rise of ISIL in 2014, 2.1 million have already returned, half of whom are in Anbar. Conditions in return areas vary; in some locations, insecurity, explosive hazards and damaged infrastructure jeopardize the safety of returning families. In others, employment opportunities are limited and basic services are functioning minimally, with disruptions to electricity and water supplies.

66. Major efforts continue to be made to stabilize newly liberated areas. In Mosul, teams working under the United Nations Mine Action Service have removed more than 700 explosive items, including suicide belts, from a single priority location, the area surrounding the High Court. Experts estimate that 11 million tons of rubble in Mosul are contaminated with explosive hazards. The Mine Action Service has developed a plan to assess and facilitate the safe removal of debris, thereby enabling safe access for stabilization teams and returning families. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has helped to generate employment and reduce food dependency for thousands of hard-hit returning families in the Ninawa Plains.

67. The Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization, established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), continued to expand. Over 1,100 projects are in progress or have been completed in 23 liberated towns and districts in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. Using fast-track procedures, the Facility is implementing 330 projects in Mosul. The Al Qasoor Water Treatment Plant has been rehabilitated, providing safe drinking water to more than half of the districts in eastern Mosul. High voltage lines have been connected across the Tigris River from eastern Mosul to power western Mosul's largest water treatment plant, and hundreds of transformers have been installed to restart electricity services. During the reporting period, public work schemes employing thousands of women and men continued in eastern Mosul and began in western Mosul, enabling vulnerable returnees to earn an income to support their families.

68. Stabilization efforts are continuing throughout the country. During the reporting period, the largest water treatment plant in Ramadi, more than 25 schools in central and western Anbar, tens of municipal shops in Karmah, Ramadi's vocational training centre, three teaching faculties at Anbar University and primary health centres in Karmah and Fallujah were rehabilitated. In Karmah, nearly 700 vulnerable women-headed households received direct cash assistance, and more than 550 families in Ramadi and Fallujah received assistance to rebuild their homes.

69. Progress on security sector reform continues. On 16 July, the Iraqi National Security Council formally endorsed the Iraqi security sector reform strategy, in support of the country's national security strategy. The Government, with support from UNDP and partners, is preparing plans to implement the seven components of the strategy: defence and internal security; intelligence; critical national infrastructure protection; democratic governance and oversight; national security architecture; law enforcement systems and civilian and local policing; and criminal justice systems. Starting in September, UNDP held training sessions for law

enforcement and judicial officers in Anbar and Ninawa. The International Organization for Migration is helping to train local units in community policing techniques; UNDP is supporting legal aid centres in the Kurdistan region of Iraq; and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is helping authorities to reissue legal documentation, including birth certificates for children born to ISIL fighters and divorce certificates for women forced to marry ISIL fighters whose whereabouts are unknown or who are presumed dead.

70. On 31 July, the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Iraq chaired a meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum with my Deputy Special Representative/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Ambassadors and Heads of Iraqi and intergovernmental aid agencies. The Deputy Minister of Planning, the Director General of Sectors Planning and the Director General of Poverty Reduction provided briefings on the status of the Government's post-ISIL development framework, including the Government's vision 2030, the national development plan (2018-2022), the general framework of the national plan for reconstruction and development of damaged Governorates due to terrorist and military attacks (the reconstruction framework) and the second Iraq poverty reduction strategy (2018-2022).

71. On 6 August, the United Nations country team, under the leadership of my Deputy Special Representative/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, met to review progress on the country team's recovery and resilience programme, which has been elaborated at the request of the Government to support the national development plan and the reconstruction framework; it will be presented at the Iraq reconstruction conference tentatively scheduled to be held in Kuwait early in 2018.

E. Security and operational issues

72. The United Nations in Iraq continues to deliver its programmes and activities in a complex and rapidly changing security environment. Military operations, including in western Anbar, are likely to cause further population displacement. Other security challenges hampering humanitarian efforts include unexploded ordnance and booby traps left over from the concluded military operations in Ninawa and other locations. There is still a major threat of casualties from crossfire and other collateral damage from hostile armed groups.

73. Despite significant security challenges, the United Nations and its partners remain actively engaged in the delivery of humanitarian and development activities, on the basis of programme criticality and in close coordination with the Government of Iraq.

74. Construction and renovation in the integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad continued. Seventy-nine new blast-proof green solution accommodations were completed, and the renovation of the infrastructure is ongoing. The Mission started replacing and enhancing its information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity with new fibre optic infrastructure to optimize its performance. As part of its initiative to reduce its environmental footprint, the Mission is extending its photovoltaic farm project for renewable energy production to compounds in Erbil and Baghdad and has begun to provide hybrid solar systems for its ICT equipment rooms and radio repeater sites Mission-wide.

IV. Observations

75. I regret that the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government were not able to find common ground on the referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Kirkuk and other disputed areas, which has led to tensions. I urge all parties to refrain from any action that might escalate those tensions. I call upon leaders across Iraq, as well as across the region, to act with patience and restraint, avoiding one-sided steps and prejudicial declarations that threaten the stability of Iraq and the region. An enhanced and structured dialogue between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, based on the Constitution, is urgently needed in order to resolve all outstanding issues. Such a dialogue should lead to a constructive compromise and mutually acceptable and sustainable solutions. The United Nations stands ready to support and facilitate such efforts, at the request of the parties concerned.

76. I expect that United Nations-mandated activities across Iraq, including in the Kurdistan region, will be allowed to continue unhindered, and call upon all relevant authorities to continue to support and facilitate the work of the United Nations.

77. I applaud the hard-won victories against ISIL, including the completion of operations to liberate Tall Afar and Hawijah. Once again, I pay tribute to the security forces and civilians who have participated in this fight. I commend the unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination among the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga. This must continue to be unaffected by the referendum, especially now that significant progress is being made in the fight against ISIL in Iraq.

78. The post-ISIL period demands an honest, meaningful and inclusive dialogue to unmask the group's hateful and exclusionary ideology, mend sectarian divisions and encourage all Iraqis to work collectively for the future of their country. The political leaders of Iraq bear a special responsibility to promote justice, accountability and reconciliation, improve governance and provide better services. The United Nations remains ready to facilitate those efforts, through the good offices of my Special Representative and in full coordination with the Government of Iraq.

79. The organization of inclusive, transparent and credible elections that reflect the will of all Iraqis will be one of the most significant immediate tests for the success of the post-ISIL phase in Iraq. I urge the Council of Representatives to expedite the selection of the new Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission, in order to proceed with timely preparations for the forthcoming elections. I strongly encourage the creation of a Board that reflects the diversity of Iraq, including through the representation of minorities and women.

80. I reiterate my calls to the Council of Representatives to accelerate the adoption of key outstanding electoral legislation. Holding the Provincial Council elections in conjunction with elections for a new Council of Representatives — as provisionally decided by the Council of Representatives — will be technically challenging. I therefore stress the responsibility of the Government of Iraq to determine an election date in 2018, as constitutionally required, as soon as possible. I further urge the federal Independent High Electoral Commission and the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission to sustain collaborative efforts, in line with their memorandum of understanding, in particular as the Kurdistan region of Iraq prepares for its regional parliamentary and presidential elections.

81. I repeat that all necessary actions must be taken to enable the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons, including those from minority communities, and to protect fully their civil and political rights, including their

enfranchisement in the forthcoming elections. This should be done through proper coordination with all Iraqi security forces, including local police forces, to create an atmosphere free from fear and intimidation, and without retribution, retaliation or forced evictions. I again encourage the Government to continue its efforts to put in place effective governance and security arrangements in Ninawa and other liberated Governorates.

82. I welcome the adoption by the Government of Iraq of a security sector reform strategy, and I encourage the Government and its partners to ensure its swift implementation. As requested by the Government, the United Nations will continue to play an active role to support those efforts, in coordination with other international partners.

83. I further welcome the establishment of the United Nations first technical working group on conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq, the Middle East and North Africa under the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. This tool is crucial to strengthening the assessment of the prevalence of sexual violence, pursuing accountability for sexual violence crimes and providing programmatic advice, training and advocacy to better tackle sexual violence.

84. Civilians continue to suffer even as the number of civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations has decreased since the end of the Mosul operation. I remain concerned about reports of indiscriminate attacks against civilians. As the territory under ISIL control shrinks, the mass graves containing the remains of the victims of the armed group that continue to be discovered serve as further proof of the group's brutality. I am also alarmed by reports of actions taken by communities and local authorities that could amount to collective punishment, targeting families alleged to have relatives affiliated with ISIL, or that are meant to discourage those families from returning to their areas of origin.

85. The United Nations continues to advocate with the Iraqi authorities to ensure that the protection of civilians is paramount in the conduct of military operations and in law enforcement activities, and stands ready to increase its efforts in support of the Government of Iraq to ensure accountability for the atrocity crimes committed in the context of the current conflict.

86. In this regard, I welcome the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2379 (2017) on 21 September. As requested by the Council in that resolution, I intend to proceed swiftly to establish an investigative team headed by a special adviser to support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by ISIL in Iraq.

87. I am concerned about the continuing implementation of the death penalty in the country, including the mass execution of 42 people on 24 September. UNAMI has repeatedly highlighted the serious flaws in Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005. I urge the Iraqi authorities to bring that law into compliance with international human rights standards, and call upon the Iraqi authorities to appoint an independent body in charge of reviewing all death penalty cases. I also recommend that the Government of Iraq adopt a moratorium on the implementation of the death penalty, with a view to its final abolition.

88. Pursuant to paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 2367 (2017), adopted on 14 July, I established an independent review team to conduct, by 15 October, an independent and external assessment of the structure and staffing of UNAMI and related resources, priorities and areas in which the Mission has comparative advantages and synergies with other United Nations entities. The team commenced

its work on 11 September. Given the complexity of its task, I am grateful to the Council for extending the deadline for the completion of work to 15 November. I look forward to reviewing the team's recommendations, so as to ensure that the Mission and the United Nations country team are configured to fulfil mandated tasks in the most appropriate and efficient manner.

89. Finally, I would like to express sincere appreciation to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, and the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their unwavering and courageous efforts in implementing the United Nations mandate in Iraq under very challenging circumstances.